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THE CENTRAL BUREAU FOR RELIEF  
OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES  
OF EUROPE

STATEMENT  
to the  
AMERICAN CHURCHES  
and  
CHRISTIAN PEOPLE

HOME OFFICE  
PETERHOFSTATT, 6, ZURICH, SWITZERLAND

AMERICAN HEADQUARTERS  
287 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK



# The Present Condition in the European Churches

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## The Churches Getting Together

Until recently there was nearly no cohesion, or at least no cooperation or federation, among the evangelical churches of Europe. It is the present need which has brought them closer together. In August, 1922, a meeting was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, known as "The Bethesda Conference," which brought together at the call of the Swiss Churches, 75 officially appointed representatives of 37 church bodies, of 21 European nations. This is the first time in modern history that the church bodies of Europe have ever met in an officially representative gathering. It was an impressive meeting: prayerful, mutually sympathetic, brotherly. It showed how close people of widely different political and racial traditions may be brought by mutual affliction and need.

The result of the Bethesda Conference was the establishment at Zurich, Switzerland, of the Central Bureau for the Relief of the Evangelical Churches of Europe:—a clearing-house for the appeals from the distressed Churches, and a central agency for the distribution of relief funds. Contributions for the administrative expenses were generously made by the Churches of America, Holland, the Scandinavian countries, and Switzerland, and the Bureau immediately went to work to make a comprehensive survey of the church situation in Europe.

## The Condition of The Churches

In fourteen European countries the churches are fighting hard for their existence. Of course the distress is not the same in all the different countries, but it can be safely said that they are all passing through the most critical hour since the Reformation. This is equally true from a spirit-



ual, political, and moral, as well as from a material point of view. A great number of Churches and evangelical institutions are no longer able to fulfill their tasks without foreign help. Their home mission work is seriously menaced. A part of such activities have already come to an end, while others are threatened with extinction or with transfer into secular or Roman Catholic hands. Asylums and other institutions have to shut their doors because they can no longer afford to maintain their equipment and personnel. Church buildings, especially in France, but also in Galicia and Latvia, are still in ruins or badly damaged; and still greater is the suffering of the pastors, their families and other church workers in some of the affected areas. In Saxony, Brunswick, Lippe, in certain parts of Czecho-Slovakia, Austria and Hungary, the parishes are unable to give the pastors a salary sufficient to protect them and their families from stark hunger.

The situation in France has long been familiar in America, as well as the need of the church institutions of Belgium, and the help needs to be continued.

Just before leaving Europe I received alarming news from Saxony. Professor Slotemacher, of Holland, and Swiss friends just returned from Dresden, are so aghast at the distress there, that in Holland and Switzerland special relief has been organized without delay among the pastors to help their suffering colleagues. Many ministers are forced to earn their living as clerks in banks and other offices. Others, even less fortunate, go into mills and into the mines in order to keep their families from starvation. Some of the churches, abruptly dis-established, and inadequately endowed, are widely believed to be going into bankruptcy and are considered by a great part of the people as a forlorn hope.

In some countries, such as Austria, Poland and Hungary, the chief anxiety is for the preservation of the evangelical schools. If they have to be closed, the coming generation cannot be educated in the evangelical faith and these Protestant minorities will disappear.

The voice of the Church is the religious press; but this voice is daily growing weaker over there, and there is danger that it may be silenced altogether. In one country, for instance, during the last four months, about three hundred church periodicals have disappeared, and while some of them could no doubt be spared, two-thirds of the number at least mean a real and irreparable loss for the life of the Church. The scientific theological periodicals are in no

better fix. To buy books or even to subscribe to a theological periodical has become impossible for thousands of pastors and students, even for many university instructors.

### **Their Depleted Resources**

Of course, this distress is only a part of the general need of the people, especially of the middle class. Church life nearly everywhere depends on this class. And this middle class is vanishing:—a social phenomenon of far-reaching significance. There is a great and silent dying in the middle class. Some go willingly and some unwillingly out of a world which holds no more hope for them.

Here I cannot refrain from giving one illustrative figure: In Austria a loaf of bread costs 6,750 crowns. In the other countries it is the same, in varying degrees.

This means hunger; especially for the many thousands who must live on small incomes. Thousands of these have died from starvation, says Professor Abderhalden, a medical authority of world-wide renown.

### **Religious Minorities**

The religious minorities in territories which have been cut off from the parent lands are under hard pressure. They are not persecuted in their religious beliefs as such, it is true, but they are hit by land legislation or by language laws. In some of these countries these measures were ostensibly directed against the foreigners and “conquered” inhabitants, but in fact they struck hard at the Protestant churches.

### **The Sunday Schools**

The lot of the children is heart-rending. In large cities ten per cent of the children have no under-clothing. Four-fifths of the children in certain cities are under-nourished. Nearly half are tuberculous.

### **The Resulting Discouragement**

From a spiritual and religious point of view this state of things (in many parts conditions are now worse than during the war) means deep discouragement, loss of faith, even disbelief in the love of God and surely in the love of man. Thousands are submerged in utter despair and see



no other way out than by suicide. It is true that need also brings forth out of the depths of the heart that cry for God, who has so often lifted his flock out of distress and utter abandonment. Certainly there is also a wonderful heroism of faith, a new spirit of resignation and sacrifice. But there are many in the churches who do not speak merely of depression, but of annihilation, and the imminent downfall of European Protestantism. There is a widespread saying that from the military standpoint, France has won the war; from the political standpoint, Great Britain; from the economic, America; from the cultural, the Jews, and from the religious point of view, the Roman Catholic Church has won it. That would mean in fact that Protestantism had lost the war. Catholics proclaim this openly. Suffice it to say that those who know are deeply concerned in their hearts for the immediate future of Protestantism in Europe, despite many signs of new life and faith.

### **Help Already Begun in Europe**

The Churches of the neutral countries on the continent of Europe do their utmost to stem the tide of distress in their neighboring countries, and to support by sympathy and brotherly love the faith of their fellow Christians. These Churches, however, are poor in resources compared with those of the United States. Yet out of their poverty they have generously supported the relief work begun by the central office at Zurich, and within the last three months, under the most trying economic conditions, they have raised approximately \$200,000. Some of the British Churches have given considerable help also. In certain countries the Churches have organized a system of adoption, through which single congregations or organizations take care of similar bodies or institutions in the areas of the suffering Churches. Invaluable bonds of Christian brotherhood and a new feeling of real responsibility have thus been developed between suffering and helping brethren. A new hope is thus infused, new courage given, and a new step forward has been made in the direction of a practical federation of the religious forces in Europe.

### **The Central Bureau Appeals to America**

The Central Bureau at Zurich is today the center of this movement for comprehensive relief of the stricken Churches. It is in constant touch with the newly created

national offices for relief in all European countries, composed of official representatives of the Churches and the different Christian agencies and interests. The Bureau can also supervise the numerous demands for help coming from all parts and help to bring justice and order into evangelical relief work. The office is not intended to take the place of the denominational relief work, which brought the first assistance to the needy Churches and for which they feel a deep and lasting gratitude. It is supervised by an International Executive Committee composed of representatives of helping Churches, and its budget is largely covered by subscriptions from the Churches of America and the neutral countries.

The European Churches grant their help not from a denominational point of view but in the interest of the common evangelical cause which is at stake. They have done a great deal, and under great difficulties. But:—on the European continent there are five countries, with about 15,000,000 souls who are able to give help. The distress, however, extends over fifteen countries, with nearly 50,000,000 souls! It is clear, therefore, in the face of the overwhelming vastness of the need, that the major part of the required aid must come from America. And it must come soon. For all that has been done by America already, there is deep gratitude, but unless the crisis is considered as a common cause for world brotherhood, the majority of European Churches with their home missionary work, their evangelical schools and evangelical press, are in jeopardy. The International Executive Committee looks, therefore, towards America, and is asking American fellow Christians, especially those who did not until now undertake any such relief work, to come out and unite their efforts with ours. We ask not for ourselves, but for our suffering brethern and for the sake of European Protestantism as a whole. The help which is needed consists not only in material succor, but in the assurance of brotherly love, in sincere sympathy, in that moral and religious encouragement which the warm pressure of a brotherly hand can give, in a testimony of an unselfish spirit of sacrifice and service. Nor can this helping hand be stretched out once and then withdrawn. What the Protestant Churches of Europe need is the sustained help and active cooperation and support of their American Sister Churches for at least the next three years. This is a grave responsibility, especially in view of the many demands already made on America by devastation, famine and distress



abroad; but it is a less crushing responsibility than the thought that through American indifference European Protestantism may perish.

The following approximate budget is a minimum, is far from covering the real wants, and would just cover the most pressing needs and prevent innumerable institutions from destruction and many families of church workers from hunger and despair:

#### Minimum Budget

\$500,000	FOR AID TO EXISTING HOME MISSION- ARY WORK
150,000	FOR EVANGELICAL HOSPITALS AND DEACONESSES' HOMES
150,000	FOR THE MOST URGENT REPAIR OF CHURCH BUILDINGS
150,000	FOR SUPPORT OF PASTORS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN NEED
150,000	FOR CHILD RELIEF IN THE LARGER TOWNS
100,000	FOR THE PRESERVATION OF EVAN- GELICAL SCHOOLS
150,000	FOR AID FOR THE PARISH POOR, ESPE- CIALLY IN THE MIDDLE CLASS
30,000	FOR THE EVANGELICAL PRESS AND RE- LIGIOUS LITERATURE
30,000	AS AID FOR RETIRED PASTORS OR THEIR WIDOWS
30,000	FOR HELP TO THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS AND CHRISTIAN STUDENT HOMES
30,000	FOR CENTRAL ORGANIZATIONS
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\$1,470,000	TOTAL

THIS BUDGET IS NEEDED FOR AT LEAST THREE CONSECUTIVE YEARS. IT COULD BE COVERED:

- A. BY GRANT OF DENOMINATIONAL BODIES IN THEIR BUDGETS
- B. BY THE APPOINTING OF A CERTAIN SUNDAY OF BROTHERLY LOVE FOR SPECIAL



OFFERINGS FOR SUCH EVANGELICAL RELIEF WORK

(Proposal of Bishop Raffay for a Sunday of Brotherly Love)

- C. BY A SYSTEM OF ADOPTION BY SUCH SINGLE PARISHES OR CONFESSIO N A L GROUPS LIKE SYNOD, CONFERENCE OR CLASSIS OR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS WHICH WOULD TAKE CARE OF SIMILAR GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SUFFERING COUNTRIES. (System adopted in Denmark)
- D. ACTION BY SUNDAY SCHOOLS
- E. BY CHURCH FEDERATIONS
- F. BY INDIVIDUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BUREAU FOR EVANGELICAL RELIEF IS READY TO OFFER THE USE OF ITS MACHINERY FOR DISTRIBUTION OF RELIEF FUNDS TO ANY ORGANIZATION OR INDIVIDUAL WILLING TO HELP FELLOW CHRISTIANS IN THE DISTRESSED COUNTRIES.

The countries covered by the above budget are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czecho-Slovakia, Esthonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Jugo-Slavia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Roumania, Russia, Spain, and the Ukraine.

A detailed report, entitled: "On The Condition of European Protestantism," setting forth clearly the needs in each country, may be secured on application.

It is understood that gifts may be designated to be used for a particular country, a particular denomination, or for particular needs.

It is especially hoped that American Churches not having any special responsibilities in Europe will adopt the Central Bureau as such.

Brotherly help granted in an unselfish Christian spirit of sacrifice and service would not only save numberless Protestant institutions, strengthen the faith and courage of millions, but also further the cooperative movement in European Christianity and strengthen in a special way the bonds between the Protestant bodies of Europe and America, and between America and Europe as peoples of one brotherhood.

THE CENTRAL BUREAU FOR RELIEF OF THE EVANGELICAL  
CHURCHES IN EUROPE

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The Central Bureau received the unanimous approval of a large representative conference of the American denominations held in New York on November 17, 1922, and also of the Executive Committee of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. Its audited reports will be submitted to the National Information Bureau in New York.

TO THE CENTRAL BUREAU FOR THE RELIEF OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES OF EUROPE:

I hereby pledge \$                      for the support of the general relief action on behalf of the Protestant Churches and Benevolent Institutions in Europe.

I      will      give a similar amount for the next two years if the situation of those Churches is still critical.

If you desire to designate your gift for a particular country, denomination, or phase of Christian work, please indicate your preference on the line below:

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Name .....

Address .....

(Mail this form to our American Offices, 287 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y. Make checks payable to "Central Bureau of European Relief.")



